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ABSTRACT

This is one of two reports by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) drawing on research and wide consultation that gave guidance and examples of good practice to support the provision of higher education in further education colleges in England. This document, concerned with strategy, is aimed at senior managers. A companion volume is directed at tutors and lecturers. Chapters of this guide are: (1) "How Colleges Used the HEFCE Development Funding"; (2) "Relationship between Scholarly Activity, Research, and Teaching and Learning: A Review of the Evidence"; (3) Case Studies of Partnership and Collaboration"; and (4) "Strategic Planning and Management." Three annexes list members of the advisory and working groups, discuss recent legislation on disability and race relations, and provide addresses and Web sites related to the good practices project. (SLD)

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April 2003/16
Good practice
Issues for senior managers
This report is for information

This is one of two reports, drawing on research and wide consultation, that give guidance and examples of good practice to support the provision of higher education in further education colleges. This document, concerned with strategy, is aimed at senior managers; the companion volume, HEFCE 2003/15, deals with implementation and is aimed at practitioners.

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Supporting higher education in further education colleges

Policy, practice and prospects

HE03/16

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HIGHER EDUCATION hefce FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND

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Foreword

This good practice guide and its companion (HEFCE 2003/15) are very timely. They are published at a point when the Government's White Paper has marked out an important role for further education colleges in developing capacity for higher education, contributing their particular strengths to meet local and regional skills needs, and providing routes for students to progress into higher education. Over the coming year we shall continue working with colleges to help ensure that they can offer learners the opportunity to engage in high quality HE and can build on their work with partner universities and higher education institutions. These guides reflect the results of extensive collaboration, carried out through the HE in FE training and support programme, working jointly with FE colleges, HEIs, sector representative bodies at regional and national levels, and the HEFCE. They are aimed at supporting managers and lecturers engaged in HE in FE colleges, and provide a framework for planning and managing HE activity. They also set out ideas and examples of how good practice can be shared and enhanced through networking.

I am sure that staff in both FE colleges and HEIs alike will find these guides helpful, and I hope that they will use them extensively to support them in widening and increasing students' access to HE.

Sir Howard Newby

Chief Executive

Higher Education Funding Council for England

Introduction

Role of further education in widening participation

In recent years, further education colleges (FECs) have come to play an increasingly important role as providers of higher education programmes. Following the recommendations of the Dearing Committee that FECs should be given 'a special mission' in the expansion of sub-degree higher education, there has been a marked growth both in the numbers of students who pursue higher education courses within FECs and in the variety of programmes offered by the colleges.

The rationale underlying this expansion is partly a reflection of the further education sector's success in recruiting non-traditional students, which has helped bring the sector to the attention of policymakers and others concerned with raising the level of participation in higher education (HE). It is often said that it is precisely because FECs are not higher education institutions (HEIs) that they are well placed to recruit and teach non-traditional students, and are able to do so at a lower cost than HEIs.

FECs are now seen as being vital in helping to achieve the Government's target to involve 50 per cent of the 18-30 age range in higher education by 2010. This is because of their proven track record in recruiting students from under-represented groups, their local accessibility, supportive and flexible methods of delivery, and close contacts with local schools, employers and HEIs.

Nevertheless, the development and growth of HE in FE has been controversial. Concern has been expressed about the quality (perceived and real) of the FE pathway through higher education, but this has largely ignored the rich and complex picture which is now emerging of excellent practice and a high level of professional commitment.

Funding

One of the recommendations of the Dearing inquiry was that responsibility for funding all categories of publicly funded higher education should be taken on by HEFCE. Since 1999, HEFCE has been responsible for funding all first degree, postgraduate, Higher National Diploma and Certificate (HND and HNC), Diploma of Higher Education, Certificate of Education and, since 2000, foundation degree courses.

It is a responsibility which covers a diverse and complex pattern of provision. As well as students on HNC and HND courses, FECs are teaching significant numbers of students on other undergraduate level courses, many of them operating under a variety of bilateral and multilateral arrangements with HEIs.

Award-giving powers

Since colleges do not have the power to award their own HE qualifications, there are different arrangements for students to study for those qualifications. Some HE courses, including many leading to higher level vocational qualifications, lead to awards from professional institutions or the major public examining bodies. Most of this non-prescribed higher education is funded

by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Most HNC and HND provision is validated by Edexcel, but some Higher Nationals, as well as all foundation degree and undergraduate courses, are offered almost entirely in bilateral and multilateral partnerships with HEIs.

The arrangements for collaboration involve varying degrees of formality, including franchising agreements, joint provision, validation arrangements, and articulation agreements. However good the partnerships are, they are extremely time-consuming and would benefit from greater transparency overall. HEFCE has recently commissioned a review of indirectly funded arrangements, which will report in autumn 2003.

Development funding

The prospect of a further 350,000 students entering higher education by 2010, many of them studying in FECs, underlines the urgency involved in supporting and developing this provision and these partnerships.

In order to help build capacity in FECs for the delivery of HE provision, HEFCE announced details of a new £9.4 million fund. This is intended 'specifically to raise the quality and standards of HE learning and teaching' within FECs, and ensure that 'the student experience in FECs is comparable to that in HEIs' (HEFCE 00/09). The HE in FE Development Fund was allocated to all FECs with over 100 HEFCE-funded full-time equivalent students (FTEs), and to consortia, for the period 1999-2000 to 2001-02. A further £18.5 million has since been approved for 2001-02 to 2003-04.

Research project

The HE in FE Training and Support Programme was a research and development project, funded by HEFCE and carried out by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in partnership with the University of Warwick, City College Manchester, and Sheffield Hallam University.

The project reviewed the provision of HE in FECs from the perspective of college staff, established how the first round of the HEFCE development funding has been spent within colleges, and identified issues for further discussion – including scholarly activity, quality matters, staff terms and conditions, and the student experience.

An advisory group supported and advised the project team. Preliminary research identified numerous examples of good practice as well as specific requests for guidance. The team was supported by a small working group in developing preliminary drafts. Membership of both groups is given in Annex A.

As the project developed, national and regional advisory and consultation events were held with senior managers and front line staff responsible for the provision and delivery of HE programmes in FECs. These discussions involved over 500 people from a wide range of institutions, including HEIs. HEFCE regional consultants and representatives of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) also contributed helpfully at this stage.

This publication, concerned with strategic matters and aimed at senior managers, together with its sister publication, concerned with implementation and aimed at practitioners, represent the fruits of this process. Ideally these publications should be read together to connect strategy and practice, although each can stand alone. Although the initial research focused on larger colleges eligible for HEFCE development funding, the materials are addressed to the sector as a whole, including colleges where HE provision is relatively new and possibly unsupported.

Structure of the document

Chapter 1 reports on the survey by the University of Warwick into how colleges spent the first round of HEFCE development funding, awarded to directly funded colleges in 1999-2000. It maps out the key themes which form the basis for Chapter 4, Strategic planning and management.

During the national consultation conferences, particular interest was expressed in what was meant by scholarly activity. This is briefly discussed in Chapter 2 in a review of the debates relating to research, teaching and learning.

Chapter 3 reflects the increasing importance of partnerships in the delivery of HE in FE. It illustrates the range of collaborative arrangements through five case studies, and suggests some key features of successful partnerships.

Chapter 4 builds on the ideas and information supplied by respondents to the questionnaire (see Chapter 1). It offers a framework for the strategic planning and management of HE in FE, and proposes seven key themes to be considered in the planning process. These themes are developed further in the sister publication aimed at practitioners.

Finally, the project has sought to stimulate discussion on how good practice can be further developed, shared and sustained through active local, regional and national networks. HE in FE is an important and increasingly significant area of work, which merits greater recognition and a national voice. As discussions gather momentum, these materials will contribute to advancing the interests and enhancing the delivery of HE in FE in the future.

1 How colleges used HEFCE development funding

1.1 Background

A key element of phase 1 of the programme was a questionnaire to collect information from colleges that received HE in FE development funding. This was intended to:

- help establish how funding had been used to support scholarly activity, as broadly defined
- indicate what colleges thought had worked well and, equally important, what had worked less well
- seek views on which areas of good practice the project might undertake, and what support materials would be most helpful
- identify examples of good/interesting practice.

The main points to emerge are summarised below, grouped around a number of themes: colleges' use of the development funds, the higher education environment, collaboration, staffing, staff development, scholarly activity, quality assurance and the student experience. These are not watertight categories, and there is inevitably overlap between them. For example, staff development features strongly in any consideration of quality assurance, and perceptions of what constitutes an appropriate HE environment relate to views of scholarly activity. Finally, the report includes areas where respondents requested good practice guidance, and a summary of responses to the question of what were the most important and pressing issues facing HE in FE in the current climate.

1.2 Colleges' use of development funding

How colleges used their development funds indicates what they believed was important in order to 'develop their HE programmes and specifically to raise the quality and standards of HE learning and teaching' (HEFCE 00/09, paragraph 1). The expenditure can be broken down into the following categories:

- information and communications technology (ICT)
- quality
- curriculum
- capital expenditure (non ICT)
- staff and staff development
- students
- other.

Information and communications technology (ICT)

Overall, this appeared to account for the largest share of the funding. Very few colleges committed nothing to this area and some spent their entire allocation on ICT-related facilities. (One college which spent all its development funding in this way then complained about the other things it was unable to do as a result – suggesting that the process by which these decisions are made within colleges might repay closer investigation.)

ICT was acquired for both staff and students: for staff often as a contribution to providing an acceptable college infrastructure; for students to ensure that they were able to use specialist equipment and software of industry standard which they would encounter in the workplace. A number of respondents commented on the difficulties of acquiring and successfully

introducing certain kinds of ICT – for example, achieving interactivity in virtual learning environments. Since many institutions are trying to do essentially the same things with ICT, it may be useful to find ways of sharing technical expertise and examples of what has worked effectively.

Quality

There was a striking emphasis on using funds to address issues of quality, primarily by creating new quality assurance (QA) systems, appointing staff with a quality brief, and substantial programmes of QA-oriented staff development. The issues raised by respondents in relation to quality are discussed in **Section 1.8** below.

Curriculum

Foundation degrees loomed large: funds were used to buy out staff time for curriculum development work or even, in the case of larger colleges with an ambitious commitment to expansion in this area, to appoint a member of staff dedicated to this work. The other most frequently cited examples of development funds being used for curriculum development were higher level key skills and, to a much lesser extent, HND top-ups (which might, of course, become foundation degree top-ups). A small number of colleges had used the funds to map their curriculum against that of neighbouring HEIs.

Capital expenditure (non–ICT)

This category most often included improving library facilities (software and book purchases), and new or refurbished facilities and buildings, including dedicated HE centres.

Staff and staff development

Development funds have been used to create two kinds of new post: those with an HE quality assurance focus and those with a more general HE management responsibility (often including a QA dimension).

Four main categories of funded staff development can be identified:

- ICT-related, reflecting the substantial investment in new hardware and software
- teaching and learning
- quality assurance, primarily introducing staff to what would be required in subject review by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
- scholarly activity (see **Sections 1.3 and 1.7** for more on this), which could be broken down into the following categories:
  - consultancy
  - industrial/professional placements
  - higher degrees
  - conferences
  - research projects
  - non-subject based activity, for example researching the market for foundation degrees, and investigating student expectations on entry.

Students

Apart from enhancing the student experience through better ICT facilities (see above), there were only a few examples of the use of development funds with an explicit student focus. Exceptions included some work on employability and on recruitment and retention.

Other

A broad range of other, mostly minor, uses of development funding were reported, for example, improving promotional literature and creating an HE-specific web-site. Respondents were clear that development funding had enabled them to do things that would otherwise not have been done at all or, at best, would have been done much more slowly. There was a recognition that sometimes plans had been over-ambitious, with too much attempted in too short a time, possibly encouraged by a concern that this welcome source of support would vanish as quickly as it appeared. The confirmation by HEFCE of a further tranche of funding was welcomed since it gave an element of stability within which longer-term planning could take place.

Certain uses of development funds were considered to have been particularly effective – QA-related activities and the acquisition of equipment were most frequently cited. The potential to free up staff time also featured prominently in this list – as it did, paradoxically, in the list of things that had been especially problematic, the difficulty being finding appropriate cover. The most common suggestion for addressing this problem (and a number of others) was longer-term planning. Again the next phase of development funding was welcomed as something which would help avoid short-term ad hoc arrangements.

1.3 The HE environment

Information relating to the creation of an appropriate HE environment was scattered throughout the completed questionnaires. But two specific questions were asked to provide some context: what was meant by 'scholarly activity' in each respondent's institution; and what differentiated higher from further education. No definition of scholarly activity was offered, to see how respondents interpreted the expression. Predictably there was a very broad range of definitions (see **Section 1.7**).

The perceived distinctions between FE and HE revealed an equally mixed set of views. Several respondents pointed out that it was important to take into account the level of HE when identifying distinguishing features. They suggested that FE level 3 and HE level 1 could have more in common than the latter and honours level work. 'We prefer to characterise the lower stages of degree-level work and the Higher National work undertaken in college as a different kind of HE experience from that which goes on in HEIs, by defining what we do as "FE/HE interface higher education".'

Most respondents were firmly of the view that such distinctions were never clear-cut, although for some the differences were more straightforward, especially when seen in terms of explicit learning outcomes and the associated teaching and assessment strategies. A large number of respondents saw the distinction, at least in part, as characterised by a need for HE students to demonstrate higher level skills. Others also saw the difference in terms of what was expected of students: peer group assessment, negotiating assignments, managing their own learning, student-led seminar and group work, self-reflection and so on. However, some student attributes which were offered as characterising HE seemed equally applicable to FE – team work and communication skills, for example. (The suggestion that the distinction lay in the fact that 'deadlines for coursework submission are more rigorously applied on HE programmes' was not widely reported.)

Attempts (whether development funded or not) to create an HE environment which reflected these distinctions ranged from the largely symbolic, such as HE 'graduation' ceremonies, to the physical, with the creation of separate HE centres. Designated HE centres had been successful in some colleges, and were popular with HE students, although they could raise issues of equality of opportunity (in relation to both students and staff) which were not easily addressed.

In most cases these facilities entailed the relatively modest provision of work areas for HE students. However, in some colleges with a substantial volume of HE work, separate centres were created, with a range of student support services and staff who only taught HE level work and whose contracts of employment reflected this. (Staff contracts are discussed further in **Section 1.5**). Again in some colleges with significant HE provision, administrative centres or HE offices had been set up combining a range of functions from marketing to quality assurance.

Links with HEIs (see **Section 1.4**) were seen as important in cultivating an HE environment. Although it did not appear to happen all that often, respondents valued the contributions of staff from partner HEIs (usually appearing as 'guest lecturers'). Benchmarking visits to HEIs had been found useful by some colleges.

Finally, one of the most effective ways reported of encouraging an HE environment consisted of simply bringing together all staff involved in HE work in the college, to share experiences, problems and solutions. Sometimes these exchanges were fairly formal through a college-wide HE forum; but more often they were ad hoc (but regular) with a generic focus on, for example, quality assurance, higher level skills or assessment. Development funding had been valuable in bringing this about by enabling staff time to be bought out (acknowledging the difficulties, mentioned above, of finding suitable cover for them).

1.4 Collaboration

Collaboration emerged as a key theme in the analysis of the responses, reflecting a variety of arrangements through which colleges worked with HEIs and/or other FECs. The nature of the collaboration ranged from formally constituted partnerships and consortia, to much looser ad hoc groupings of institutions for specific purposes. It was noticeable that the development of foundation degrees was often behind the creation of HE/FE partnerships rather than stemming from collaborative arrangements that already existed. In all but one case, the collaborative arrangements were essentially local.

A lengthy list of potential benefits to working collaboratively was offered: shared expertise, support and good practice, economies of scale, access to skills that a college might not have, better progression opportunities for students, more effective planning for widening participation, bids for funds that were only possible on a collaborative basis, opportunities for staff and curriculum development, access to a wider range of learning materials, networking opportunities, better understanding of colleges' regional role and so on. In some cases, capacity to deliver HE in a college would never have been established without close collaboration with an HEI. 'We would not have had the ability to respond as an FE college,

without the central support units of a university like X, to create from scratch the documentation, policies, procedures, systems that we need to run "quality" HE.'

These benefits were not always easy to achieve, however, not least because of the time and energy required by partnership working. Typical responses were: 'the demands within FECs make it difficult to devote sufficient time to collaboration in order to maximise the benefits'; 'collaboration involves numerous meetings which slows down the development process'; 'hugely costly in time and effort – the equivalent of a three-legged race compared with a sprint'. Some other difficulties reflected the geographical context: a college working in a large urban setting with many partners pointed out how hard it could be to keep information flowing smoothly and to ensure that all partners felt that they were genuinely informed and involved. Colleges operating in a rural environment pointed out that collaboration for them meant staff travelling substantial distances, often in regions with a poor transport infrastructure, and that this was costly in both time and money.

In the case of collaborative working with HEIs, one of the most commonly cited difficulties concerned HE attitudes to FE. Sometimes this reflected an inability of the HEI to deliver at an operational level what had been promised: 'the commitment at an institutional level is not always matched at departmental level'. More often the problem was seen by respondents as, at best, a lack of understanding on the part of HE staff about FE and, at worst, the 'arrogant, superior and condescending attitude of some (senior) staff of the university towards FE staff'. That respondent went on to point out that, as a result of such attitudes, 'it can be difficult to persuade our staff to attend events where they are treated as second class'.

Tensions between colleges and partner HEIs were frequently referred to by colleges with experience of both direct and indirect funding of their HE work. Although there was no suggestion that the broader issues surrounding HE in FE were any different in the two cases, an indirect funding relationship with an HEI could have benefits in terms of access to HE facilities for both staff and students. On the other hand, there were clearly perceived financial advantages in direct funding arrangements (despite an acknowledgement that this involved some inflexibility in terms of student numbers). For some the overheads charged by HEIs meant that indirect funding for the college was such that 'the revenue from franchised courses was insufficient to make the process cost-effective'. Moreover, there was considerable resentment that in an indirect funding relationship it was by no means clear that HEFCE teaching and learning funds and widening participation premiums were passed on to the college.

Despite these difficulties there was a strong sense that collaboration was important. Several respondents pointed out that it posed a challenge in a climate of increasing competition – between HEIs under pressure to recruit and their local FECs, and between colleges themselves – but there was broad agreement that ways had to be found of making it work. There was also agreement on the necessary underlying principles of clarity of purpose, openness, trust and equality, and, in particular, a genuine wish to collaborate. ('The "enforced" collaboration which has resulted from the consortia arrangements required to ensure successful funding bids has created somewhat artificial and contrived collaboration.')

1.5 Staffing

The returns suggest that the bulk of HE teaching in FE is carried out by full-time staff (around 75 per cent, although the role of the part-timer can be greater in specialist colleges and in the delivery of technical, niche provision). Where use is made of part-time staff who are practitioners or who have an industrial background, a number of examples of good practice were offered. These included induction programmes, the use of mentors, payment to attend staff development and course committee meetings, access to the college's staff development programme, access to a teacher training qualification, and involvement in teaching observation.

One specialist college with a substantial number of part-time staff contributing to its HE programmes had introduced 'a series of staff training events phased over two years to disseminate best practice in learning and teaching and to inform part-time staff of the changes and issues in HE together with arrangements for quality assurance'. Part-time staff were paid to attend this programme of one-day events.

Few colleges claimed to have a formal policy of stipulating a minimum qualification for staff teaching on an HE programme, although in practice it is usual to expect a qualification one level above that being taught. While the larger providers of HE increasingly seek a postgraduate qualification, in colleges with only a small amount of technical, specialist provision a more pragmatic approach is adopted. 'Since many of our courses are vocational and niche provision, industrial experience may compensate as long as the team contains other staff with the required qualifications.' Most respondents claimed that staff wishing to study for a higher qualification would be supported through the college's staff development programme, usually through the payment of fees and, less often, an allowance of

In the colleges that responded, the pay and conditions of staff were, without exception, the same for those teaching HE and FE. A range of practices was used to reduce the teaching load of HE tutors. Known variously as 'abatement' or 'remission', they essentially involved either an allowance of hours for programme or course team leaders, or the use of a bewildering variety of equations which linked one taught hour of HE to a higher number of timetabled hours.

Despite this ingenuity the resulting teaching load would still appear dauntingly high to someone from an HEI. It would be hard to concur with the respondent who, after describing how someone teaching only HE could have their hours reduced to 650 a year, could claim that as a result 'the teaching load is commensurate with the HE sector norm'. For those teaching HE only (and in the great majority of cases staff teach both HE and FE so these figures are the most favourable) the lowest teaching load quoted by a respondent was 600 hours a year and the highest 820. The extent to which necessary staff development can be combined with this commitment is seen as a crucial issue. One HE manager admitted that 'this is a matter of some resentment because of the additional scholarship and updating of skills to be able to teach at this level'.

1.6 Staff development

This section looks at issues raised in relation to staff development other than in the area of scholarly activity (which is discussed in **Section 1.7**). Although the questionnaire asked for examples of effective staff development which had arisen from development funding, respondents offered a wider view of activities to support staff teaching HE. A range of examples of what had worked is given below.

As mentioned earlier, and given the teaching loads referred to above, the capacity to release staff for both college-wide and external staff development and training events was seen as extremely valuable. 'This is now the most productive use of development funding, as normal opportunities for staff to meet are very limited.' However, many colleges reported severe problems in arranging this. 'We had planned to invest considerably in staff development. The realities of obtaining cover for our HE staff have proved largely insurmountable.' This emerged as a real constraint and the reasons given – lack of specialist staff, poor rates of pay for cover, staff unwilling to have their classes taught by others – may be only partly solved by the longer-term planning which several respondents believed would help.

Examples of staff development which respondents offered included the following:

- team teaching and peer appraisal
- secondment of staff to act as departmental teaching and learning co-ordinators
- establishment of working groups of HE staff with a focused task and a brief to report back
- task groups to develop an institutional teaching, learning and assessment strategy
- release of a member of staff to work with programme teams across the institution to develop their awareness of ICT potential for curriculum development and delivery
- staff from different programme areas researching appropriate types of digital technology suitable for their specialism
- staff encouraged to act as QAA reviewers and external examiners
- identification of ICT 'champions' to encourage staff development in it
- staff development for non-academic staff – introducing an HE dimension to the work of library, study centre and resource based learning staff.

Several respondents pointed out that such initiatives worked best when staff were persuaded of their relevance and importance. To that end, audits of staff HE needs had been found useful in some colleges, as had the use of appraisal to identify staff with significant HE commitments.

1.7 Scholarly activity

An extraordinarily wide range of responses was offered to the question of what 'scholarly activity' meant in respondents' institutions. Some saw it in the most general terms as 'any activity designed to raise the consciousness of the person concerned in relation to the subject'. Some talked specifically in terms of continuing professional development, others in relation to the student experience ('that which supports and develops pedagogic practice and enriches students' learning experiences in clearly defined ways'). Other characteristics of scholarly activity which were identified included studying for a higher degree, conference

attendance, consultancy, structured curriculum development work, reading journals, writing and giving papers, and action research.
Whatever the interpretation, respondents took pains to stress why these activities took place: 'they are focused on excellence for our students, not upon establishing the college's reputation for research'.

There is an important distinction to be drawn between the cultivation of a general research culture in FE, and scholarly activity which has a clear subject focus. The former is reflected in a range of activities, many supported by development funding. They included, for example, work on the transition between academic levels, on the market for future foundation degrees, on 'researching the vocational relevance of existing provision and identifying potential gaps in the overall college portfolio', and on students' expectations of higher education.

The importance of updating subject skills and knowledge was recognised by many respondents as crucial. A narrower definition of scholarly activity focused on ensuring currency of subject knowledge, reflected in higher quality teaching, would probably be broadly supported. However, few examples were provided in the returned questionnaires of how this subject-focused activity was being encouraged (whether development funded or not), other than through staff studying for a higher degree, secondments to a relevant work setting (although problems of replacing seconded staff were mentioned once more), and general references to conference attendance. A small number of colleges had introduced schemes to stimulate (primarily) subject-based research, through, for example, setting up a college research committee and providing modest pump-priming funding for small-scale activities but, so far, these had made only limited progress.

It was striking how little mention was made of the actual or potential contribution of HEIs to the process of subject-specific staff development in colleges. This does not mean that it is not happening, of course, and the case studies of the various HE/FE consortia suggest that subject-based support is being offered in some cases. However, based on analysis of the uses of development funding and the information on FE/HE collaboration provided by respondents, this is an area which needs looking at carefully. It may well raise questions about the incentives required for HEIs to provide this kind of support.

1.8 Quality

One area where HEIs have been active in supporting FECs and in providing the benefit of their experience has been quality assurance, in particular by helping colleges to prepare for QAA subject review. In some cases this involved HEIs working with college staff to enable them to replicate the HEI's QA system in the college. In other cases joint FE/HE meetings and workshops were held to introduce college staff to what QAA subject review would entail.

From the questionnaires it appears that there was more staff development around issues of quality assurance (as a result of subject review) than any other area. Subject review was clearly, as one respondent put it, 'a painful but valuable staff development exercise'. Apart from working with partner HEIs on quality matters, colleges reported that in-house workshops with a QA focus, involving all HE staff, had been particularly effective as had the use of an external consultant prior to a QAA visit. A number of colleges said that the appointment of a member of staff with a clear QA brief was a helpful development. Several respondents

stressed how important it was to ensure that staff development on quality was not confined to academic staff but included administrative colleagues and support staff.

The most striking feature of the information on quality was the polarisation between those who believed that a separate QA system for HE was essential and those who saw no difficulty in reconciling their HE and FE systems. For the former group of respondents, the reason for a differentiated system lay in the different approaches to assessing quality taken by the QAA and OFSTED/the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). 'The key area is around the differing focus of QAA as a peer review process, as opposed to OFSTED which is an inspection. The college is still working with staff to ensure that this difference is understood'; 'it is an inspectorial model versus a peer review process – the latter is no less rigorous but presents different challenges for staff and college managers.'

On the other hand many colleges reported no difficulties in reconciling the requirements of the two systems. 'The college has recently redesigned its FE quality review process – methodology and paperwork – and the process for HE courses has been built into the twice-yearly course team reviews, with self-assessment questions based on the prompts from the QAA self-evaluation document aide memoire.'

Those opting for a separate HE system offered a lengthy list of requirements which could only be met in this way. They included the need for HE Boards of Study, separate academic regulations, feedback questions at the end of modules, HE staff handbooks, staff-student liaison committees, programme specifications, course reviews based on QAA subject review headings, cohort files, and peer observation.

It might be expected that colleges with a substantial amount of HE would be more inclined to develop a separate QA system, but there is no clear evidence in the returns to support this. Nor does it appear that the adoption of a separate HE system resulted in more successful QAA scores overall, or in quality management and enhancement in particular. At present, we have a situation in which some colleges are convinced that 'there is no reconciliation possible', while others assert that 'we have not encountered any major issues'. There was, however, one quality issue which everyone agreed on: the need to reconcile QAA and Edexcel requirements.

An analysis of the average scores obtained by FECs in the six aspects of subject review suggests that quality was higher than some commentators have suggested. Only two areas – teaching, learning and assessment, and quality management and enhancement – indicated some cause for concern. This explains at least in part the high priority given by respondents to assessment as an area where guidance would be welcome, and also why matters of quality were so visible in the analysis of how colleges spent the first round of development funding.

1.9 The student experience

The activities reported on above are, of course, intended to enhance the student learning experience. Specific developments intended to address the student experience more directly and which, for the most part, were the result of development funding, included:

- induction to HE programmes

- attempts to link college HE students with local university students
- student support (including language, numeracy, dyslexia, dyscalcia, English as a second language, and study skills)
- enhancing employability (through visits, guest speakers from industry, work experience, business seminars, buying in careers advice from a local HEI. 'The careers input has been a major factor in creating a separate student experience')
- production of an HE handbook
- development of computer-based packages for supporting part-time students when off site
- designated support staff for HE students
- a personal development plan scheme
- student work placements
- creating a distinct HE area (see also **Section 1.3**). 'Resourcing an HE base room has had considerable impact on students' learning and research skills, and has encouraged a culture change by both students and staff to their HE programmes of study'
- a range of on-line developments to provide students with information and learning materials
- development of strategies to improve student retention and achievement
- work on better understanding why students enrol on part-time HE courses and their expectations.

1.10 Areas where good practice guidance would be welcome

The broad areas that respondents identified were: what makes HE 'higher'; learning and teaching; QA; collaboration and partnership; and managing and planning HE in FE.

In more detail what was suggested included:

- action research and scholarly activity
- assessment – strategy, range of methods, rigour
- creating an HE ethos
- course delivery and pedagogy
- teaching and learning strategies and implementation
- the development of higher level skills
- QA differentiation for HE and FE
- curriculum innovation and design with the Edexcel framework
- student feedback and response
- library/learning resources and the curriculum
- HE and FE co-operative curriculum development
- preparation for QAA reviews
- guidance on self-evaluation documents
- Edexcel guidance notes on HNC/HND integration into QAA specifications
- use of technology for:
  - information manipulation
  - differentiated supply/resources for HE and FE students
  - learning support
  - developing research skills
- progressive development of students as independent learners
- peer observation
- employer involvement in vocational programmes

- how to work effectively with schools on recruitment
- common skills/key skills
- developing a research culture
- critical thinking examples
- budgetary planning on library resources, IT and continuing professional development
- careers guidance
- maintaining uniqueness of provision and economy of scale
- flexible workload strategies to promote scholarly study and teaching for staff
- management of complex modular schemes
- role of high-level subject research in FECs
- supervision of level 3 dissertations in degree programmes
- foundation degrees
- use of ICT in delivery and assessment
- use of QA to inform and drive enhancement
- generic modules across different programmes
- work-based learning and accreditation of prior (experiential) learning
- effective use of the academic tutor.

1.11 Other issues

The final section of the questionnaire invited respondents to identify any other issues concerning HE in FE. The following were the most frequently offered:

- funding (a general concern that it was never sufficient)
- tensions between HNDs and foundation degrees
- competition, between colleges and with HEIs
- Edexcel problems
- staff contracts (a fundamental issue which many respondents returned to here even if it had already been flagged earlier in the questionnaire)
- recruitment of qualified staff
- QA demands
- government policy (lack of) on the role of HE in FE
- too many questionnaires (point taken).

1.12 Conclusion

The questionnaire returns produced a substantial quantity of information which helped to identify the key areas where support and guidance was most needed. Although the number of offers of good practice was not high (indeed, throughout the project it has proved difficult to persuade colleagues to come forward with examples of what has worked well for them), respondents raised a large number of issues which provided a useful framework for the next phase.

1.13 A note on the survey

After consultation with other members of the project team and HEFCE officers, the final version of the questionnaire was distributed to 132 colleges on 6 February 2002 with a covering letter explaining the purpose of the exercise and a request to return the completed questionnaire within two weeks. Communication was directly with each college principal, with

a request that the questionnaire be passed for completion to the most appropriate person in that college.

By the end of the two-week period around 25 questionnaires had been returned. The following week was spent phoning all non-responding colleges and requesting that a return be made. (Principals' secretaries were particularly effective in achieving this.) When necessary, further calls were made to colleges that had not responded but where it was known that there were activities of potential interest.

By mid-March, when analysis of the information provided began in earnest, 60 questionnaires had been returned. Given the broad range of information that was being sought, a 45 per cent response rate was gratifyingly high, and the completed questionnaires provided a representative sample of colleges with respect to size and region. Completed questionnaires continued to arrive throughout phase 1 of the project, the total finally reaching 69.

Almost without exception, respondents put considerable effort into completing the questionnaires and provided an honest 'warts and all' account of their experiences. (This provided an interesting comparison with the monitoring statements for HEFCE, which the project team also analysed and which were, understandably perhaps, more upbeat and bullish in tone.) Apart from the obvious implications of writing for different audiences, these differences may also reflect the fact that the questionnaire returns were generally made by those at the 'sharp end' with responsibility for HE in their institution, rather than by senior management.

2 Relationship between scholarly activity, research, and teaching and learning: a review of the evidence

From the analysis of the questionnaire returns, it was clear that the issues of scholarly activity, the development of a research culture, and pedagogy were of considerable interest. What can research tell us about the experiences within FE of HE curriculum and pedagogy, and the development in FECs of research-led approaches to teaching and learning?

2.1 Assessment

In a detailed case study of assessment and moderation procedures for degree classifications in a degree programme in England, Ecclestone (2001) notes that many pedagogic practices in HEIs are typically based on subjective, and often tacit, norms. She presents qualitative data suggesting that even recent moves towards adopting explicit learning outcomes with associated assessment criteria have not generated common interpretations of the required level and standard of work, so that assessments are often based, in part, on intuitive judgements about students' achievements. Her fieldwork findings suggest that the HEI staff did little to induct and socialise staff in FECs into an academic community of practice, and that communication about criteria and standards requires 'ongoing reconstruction' and dialogue. This case study was in a social science discipline, where learning outcomes could include such broad goals as analysis and critique; it may be that in some subjects, outcomes are less open to subjective interpretation.

Other learning resources can also be more restricted within FECs. One regional study of franchised provision of HE in FECs in the north-west of England identified shortcomings in the process, as well as difficulties with the provision of appropriate information skills work and in making available book and journal stocks and support services (Goodall 1994).

2.2 Correlation between research and learning and teaching

It has been repeatedly asserted that a vibrant research culture is an essential element of the higher education experience. Indeed, the reported regularity of the association between ratings in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and subject review scores has been advanced as a reason for focusing future growth in the more research-intensive institutions, rather than in FECs (Giddens 2001). However, there has been little serious investigation of these propositions, which remain more articles of faith within HEIs than proven foundations of pedagogic practice. A number of British authors have questioned the association between RAE ratings and subject review scores (Jenkins 2000, Hughes and Tight 1995). More substantially, a comprehensive international meta-analysis of published investigations into the relationship between research quality and teaching/learning found no evidence of an underlying association, at least at the generic level (Hattie and Marsh 1996).

In so far as there is any evidence to support a positive correlation between research and teaching/learning, it comes from qualitative studies. These appear to suggest that, while there can be such links, they are highly context-dependent, and have been created by purposive action (Jenkins 2000). Particularly important are those methods of teaching and learning which emphasise a research-like approach to learning (Dempster and Blackmore 2001). If the research evidence does not support a general association between teaching and research

within HEIs, and is limited in respect of specific links, it is important to identify evidence within FECs of efforts to develop specific links that appear to have worked.

2.3 Research in FECs

However, when it comes to HE in FECs, relatively little research evidence is available. A number of efforts have been made to engage FECs in research, usually in action research, with a view to improving practice. Both the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) and the Scottish Further Education Unit have sought to strengthen college-based research, but the evidence of impact is largely short term and often qualitative and anecdotal.

In an overview for the LSDA, Cousin (2002) describes a number of features of change achieved through a national programme of college-based action research projects; perhaps inevitably, though, the evidence of impact is relatively short term. Cunningham and Doncaster (2002) describe an attempt to embed an action research culture among teaching staff at Harlow College, using targeted research projects in key development areas. Reportedly, 'significant measurable quality improvements' were the direct result, but no evidence is given for this claim; and the authors also warn that the programme made 'very heavy' demands on staff time.

It is difficult to see how any significant increase in research capacity in FECs might take place without a parallel increase in resources. In the context of current trends towards even greater concentration of research funding within the HE systems of the UK, this prospect seems highly unlikely. If it is, indeed, the case that a vibrant research culture is integral to the higher education learning experience, then this must prove a fatal stumbling block. But the absence of a vibrant research culture within FECs may be viewed as a relatively minor issue. Meta-analyses show that it is by no means clear that research is generally central to teaching quality, and a more research-led approach to teaching may be developed without direct involvement in research.

Moreover, much of the recent growth in HE has been in strongly vocational areas such as tourism, hospitality, management and applied ICT, where recent exposure to industry, and strong contacts with local firms, may be central to the achievement of the stated learning objectives. In this context, it is worth noting that the first successful lawsuit by students over the quality of their HE qualification concerned an HND which had not resulted in the students gaining employment in the sector concerned (Baty 2002).

If FECs were to change their character, they might also lose much of their attractiveness to non-traditional learners. Morgan claims that the community college sector in the US has down-played its local role as a result of its growing involvement in HE programmes, and concludes that it therefore offers a questionable model for British FECs (Morgan 2000). One comparative study of post-compulsory education and training across the UK has provided evidence of academic drift within the Scottish system, in that it appears to favour academic rather than vocational or mixed-mode tracks at 16-plus (Raffe et al 2001).

2.4 Subject reviews

Is there anything that can be learned about scholarly activity in FE from subject review? In Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMI) reports on FECs rarely comment on

scholarly activity. The term 'subject review' denotes a process leading to an overview of quality of all provision, broken down by subject, with one comprehensive report for each college.

A search was undertaken of all 10 of the college-wide subject reviews published by HMI to date, and all uses of the word 'research' or its derivatives were examined. The word research did not occur at all in two of the reports. It did occur in seven, but only in relation to either market research or student work and not staff activity. In only one instance did the word refer to staff activity as well. This was in respect of part of the University of Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute with a small number of research students, whose staff in Gaelic were commended for having a 'comprehensive up-to-date knowledge of current trends in Gaelic education and research' (HMI subject review of Lews Castle College, 28 March 2002). This pattern is consistent with the overall view as to the low importance given so far in Scotland to scholarly activity within FECs.

In England, where subject review refers to a review of provision in each subject, with a separate report for each institution covering quality in that subject only, subject reviewers did occasionally comment on scholarly activity. All subject review reports on HE in FECs were examined, and again note was made of all uses of the word 'research' and its derivatives. Subject review teams occasionally mentioned market research, but the overwhelming majority of uses referred either to student work or staff activity. This was particularly the case where the FEC itself had indicated that research formed part of its strategy for teaching and learning.

Most subject review reports on FECs referred to research as part of the student experience. At Barnsley College, for example, students on higher education courses in travel and tourism were expected to conduct a small research project in an industrial context. The reviewers noted the existence of a research methods module and commented favourably on the career relevance of the project (subject review report Q363/2001).

Subject review teams also commented on research and other scholarly activities. Overwhelmingly, where scholarly activities attracted comment, the subject reviewers focused on research. A report on hospitality and related areas at one college noted encouragement to undertake higher degrees, as well as '[redacted]creasing development of curriculum-led research and consultancy activity', as particularly commendable aspects of provision (Q15/2001). In a number of other cases, the comments made were negative ones, and these usually resulted in recommendations for the future.

This pattern seems somewhat stronger in some subjects, such as education, than in others. One report on a college with 153 students on education provision, including four postgraduate courses, praised the termly staff development conference and support for doctoral studies, but argued that the curriculum 'is not extensively underpinned and informed' by staff scholarship and research, as had been claimed in the self-assessment. In this respect, the team concluded that, because of high workloads, the college did not meet expectations for a centre teaching to Masters' level. The report also identified the library stocks as insufficient for any higher education programme in this subject (Q332/2001).

Similar comments were found in other subject areas, particularly where provision was judged to be weak in quality management and enhancement. A review of land-based industry

provision concluded that, in some areas, the courses are clearly research led. In others, although the curriculum is effectively underpinned by scholarship, consultancy and industrial updating, increased research activity would be beneficial (Q107/97). At one college, where specialist engineering provision was judged unsatisfactory overall, recent staff involvement in research was seen to make a positive contribution to student learning (Q203/2000).

However, the reports did not always single out research. In some cases, the reference to scholarly activity was general rather than specific. Thus, one report in business and management referred, somewhat loosely, to the absence of 'activities appropriate to the continued enhancement of the HE provision' (Q295/2001). There were also a number of reports which did not identify either research or other scholarly activities as issues, despite finding provision unsatisfactory overall.

Links with business and industry

However, external reviewers also singled out other areas which are not normally regarded in the UK as part of scholarly activity within HE. In particular, both HMI in Scotland and subject review teams in England were far more likely to comment on the quality of industry links than on research activity. Thus the report on hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism at Blackpool and the Fylde College praised the 'appropriate inputs from employers and links with a range of regional, national and international organisations, and regular industry contact for staff which ensure focus and relevance in the curriculum' (Q15/2001).

In other cases, subject review teams brought the two areas together, as in this example from a report on business and management. 'Staff teaching at final-year degree level should be encouraged to ensure that curriculum content is up to date through engagement in scholarship and first-hand experience of business' (Q127/2001). In all cases, positive links with business were singled out for praise; their absence was seen as a marked weakness.

FE in general has attracted relatively little attention from educational researchers, and what research there is on HE in FE is skewed towards policy and advocacy. More particularly, there is virtually no research, and therefore no robust evidence, on the extent and nature of scholarly activity within the sector, with the exception of some scoping work carried out by the LSDA. It is therefore difficult to point to any evidence into the ways in which particular scholarly activities, including research, can influence the quality of teaching and learning on HE programmes within FECs.

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3 Case studies of partnership and collaboration

3.1 Partnership and collaboration

The related themes of partnership and collaboration have featured prominently throughout this project. As the questionnaire survey indicated, colleges reported an involvement in a very wide range of partnerships – with a single HEI, with several HEIs, with other FECs (with or without an HEI), in funding consortia, and in short-term arrangements for a specific time-limited purpose. While some partnerships have a lengthy history (the Huddersfield Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training, for example, has its origins in collaborative work dating back to the 1960s), many are of recent origin. There is some evidence that the emergence of new partnerships has been given added impetus by a number of external drivers. These include HEFCE's expressed preference for indirect funding arrangements for HE in FE and all that implies, and, most recently, the joint HEFCE/LSC Partnerships for Progression initiative.

As **Section 1.4** illustrates, the list of perceived benefits of partnership working, whatever the initial reason for the collaboration, is a long one, embracing issues of efficiency and quality as much as access and accessibility. To illustrate the range of existing partnerships, and some of these benefits, a number of brief case studies follow, chosen to reflect different purposes, structures, memberships and ways of working. The case studies are of:

- the Higher Education & Training Partnership (HETP), a HEFCE funding consortium led by Middlesex University
- Humber FE/HE Consortium, a HEFCE funding consortium led by Hull College
- Sheffield Hallam University Associate College Network
- Greater Manchester Consortium for HE in FE
- Suffolk College and University of East Anglia partnership.

The final section of this chapter discusses some of the key issues to emerge – drawing both on the case studies and on information relating to issues of partnership and collaboration which have surfaced during the project.

3.2 The Higher Education & Training Partnership (HETP)

Key features:

- a funding consortium led by an HEI
- built on earlier partnerships
- a broader focus than provision and funding
- a full-time director
- an extensive system of networking groups.

Background

The HETP is a well-established consortium, recognised by HEFCE for funding purposes, consisting of Barnet College, Harlow College, Middlesex University, the College of North-East London, and Waltham Forest College. It is focused on north London and the Lee Valley and its mission is 'to provide high-quality, accessible, innovative, relevant and cost-effective lifelong educational and training opportunities and, thereby, to contribute significantly to the economic, social and cultural well-being and success of the communities it serves'.

The consortium has its origins in earlier, wider partnerships, stretching back to the 1980s, and the building of links between FE and HE through one of the earliest Authorised Validating Agencies for Access provision. During the early to mid-1990s, Middlesex University developed an extensive associate college scheme with local FECs. About five years ago discussions between the university and college principals around the nature of the FE/HE relationship led to proposals to create an 'inner circle' of four colleges and the university. The wider associate college network continued. The new grouping took the title 'The Higher Education & Training Partnership' and was formally established in July 1998.

Role of the partnership

From the outset the focus of the HETP was wider than HE in FE, as its aims make clear:

- to develop a strategic collaborative approach to training and education provision within the region to support social and regional economic regeneration
- to plan and provide collaboratively for increased part-time higher education opportunities jointly delivered to local communities
- to develop institutional strategic plans in partnership so that major investment decisions are rational and coherent at a regional and sub-regional level
- to review current non-core activities with a view to developing joint, mutually beneficial corporate service agreements
- to develop and provide staff development programmes associated with joint management and corporation development
- to strategically plan and bid in partnership for funding through government, funding council and other regional and national initiatives.

The HETP has proved an effective vehicle for both bidding for and sustaining a broad range of project work with a local economic regeneration dimension, especially where there has been a strong IT component. A number of initiatives have spun off from HETP work including the local Open Learning Partnership.

Although the primary emphasis of the HETP was not on provision, when responsibility for funding higher level work in colleges transferred from the then Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) to HEFCE, the partnership successfully sought recognition as a funding consortium. The pattern of HE in each of the four partner colleges was, and remains, quite distinct: for example, most of Waltham Forest's work is validated by Edexcel, while most provision by the College of North-East London leads to Middlesex University awards. Despite these differences, there were seen to be mutual advantages in acquiring funding consortium status, not least through increased flexibility over the allocation of student numbers and the potential to bid collaboratively for additional student numbers.

Structure and processes

The formal framework within which the HETP operates is provided by a partnership agreement to which the four colleges and the university are all signatories. The agreement covers, inter alia, matters both of principle (aims and objectives, expectations and obligations of partners, responsibilities for aspects of the partnership's work) and of procedure (programme planning, quality assurance and academic standards, and funding arrangements). It is currently being reviewed against HEFCE's code of practice for funding consortia and will thereafter be reviewed every two years.

Under the terms of the agreement, oversight of the work of the partnership is the responsibility of an HETP executive which comprises the principals of each of the colleges and the vice-chancellor and deputy vice-chancellor of the university. The executive meets monthly, and has responsibility for a range of strategic matters including determining the HETP's strategic plan, annual action plan and targets, monitoring of the annual budget and performance indicators. An HETP management group, consisting of the partnership's director (see below) and a senior representative from each of the colleges, also meets monthly with a focus on more operational matters. These include agreeing initial HE student numbers in partner colleges, monitoring recruitment against targets, monitoring relevant funding and finance issues, identifying QA issues, and receiving reports from the HETP networking groups.

The work of the director and the creation of networking groups are key features of the HETP. Occupying a senior full-time post and based at the university, the director has management responsibility for the work of the partnership and plays a pivotal role in its successful operation. Networking groups were created to provide opportunities for staff across the partner institutions to be involved in developments and to share experiences across all aspects of the HETP's work. Areas covered by the groups include:

- quality assurance, enhancement and standards
- marketing and admissions
- student financial support and support services
- learning and teaching
- income generation and enterprise
- foundation degrees
- human resources and staff development
- estates and facilities.

Membership of each group normally consists of one or two representatives from each of the partner institutions. The director reports to the executive on the work of the groups.

In addition to these more or less formal structures, the HETP keeps partner institutions informed through:

- a newsletter published three times a year
- 'communication mornings' which bring together front line staff from all partner institutions to enhance general awareness and understanding of the HETP and its work
- an annual conference for governors of partner institutions
- a web-site
- a comprehensive and accessible staff handbook which is revised annually.

Liaison between partners at a course level takes place through an extensive scheme of link tutors in the university and the colleges. For directly-validated Edexcel provision, course leaders provide the HETP director with a shorter version of the annual monitoring report. The director liaises with the HE co-ordinators in each college to follow up any issues of concern.

Some of the benefits to the colleges of being part of a funding consortium have been mentioned already: flexibility over the allocation of student numbers and the potential for expanding their HE through collaborative bidding for additional numbers. The colleges also

recognise the importance of the quality assurance which is built into the partnership. This includes the role of the university link tutors, the requirement for provision to go through the Middlesex University QA procedures, staff from each institution having access to each other's library and computing facilities, internal staff development programmes being open to all staff covered by the HETP, and reduced fee arrangements for college staff wishing to register for a university programme (and vice-versa).

For the university, the benefits of the partnership are partly seen in terms of student progression opportunities, but also through strengthening its role as a significant player and stakeholder in the sub-region. By working through the HETP, the university emphasises its commitment to local economic and social regeneration in a more effective way than would be possible as an HEI alone.

Lessons from the HETP

The ability to build on existing links between the HETP partners was clearly of enormous benefit in establishing the partnership. And the fact that many of the key senior players today have a long history of working successfully together continues to be an important contributor to the success of the HETP. Commitment at the most senior level, as seen in the role played by the executive, sends a clear message about the importance of the enterprise. There is an effective management structure, built around the key role of the director, while the system of network groups involves a broad range of staff from all the partner institutions.

Contact

For further information about the work of the HETP, visit www.hetp.org.uk.

3.3 The Humber FE/HE Consortium

Key features:

- an FE-led funding consortium
- a diversity of partners including two HEIs
- a focus on widening participation and progression in a regional context
- a simple organisational structure.

Background

Created in 1998, the Humber FE/HE Consortium is recognised by HEFCE for funding purposes and is led by Hull College. It exists 'to offer a managed consortium resource; engage in the analysis of sub-regional economic and social goals; produce a flexible and coherent sub-degree delivery, and contribute to a regional strategic approach to capacity building and widening participation'.

Among HEFCE-recognised funding consortia it is unique in having two HEIs in membership – the University of Hull and the University of Lincoln (formerly Lincolnshire and Humberside). Apart from the lead institution, four FECs are members – East Riding, Bishop Burton, North Lindsey and Grimsby Colleges; and three sixth form colleges – Wyke and Wilberforce (in Hull) and Franklin (in Grimsby). The origins of the consortium can be traced back to a collaborative FEFC-funded widening participation project, which involved a number of the Humberside FECs, the two universities, and local authority adult education providers.

This experience of working in partnership provided a basis for establishing a more formal consortium in response to HEFCE's call for collaborative arrangements through which HE provision in FE could be funded. The partners recognised that a strong consortium set up for this purpose, and with a clear sub-regional focus, could increase access to a range of funding possibilities.

The role of the consortium

The consortium aims to:

- ensure that its provision widens participation and targets those who would not otherwise have participated in HE
- develop new progression routes for learners which meet local employer needs in terms of curriculum content and through flexible modes of delivery
- develop and enhance partnerships with employers and professional bodies to ensure provision addresses needs for higher skills
- develop staff expertise and institutional capacity to assure quality.

In setting out to meet its objectives the consortium has identified a number of ways in which its success can be judged:

- a growing portfolio of sub-degree provision, based on labour market information, that avoids unnecessary duplication and wasteful competition
- performance against such indicators as recruitment to target, retention, achievement, and positive progression outcomes
- established and evidenced relationships with the Regional Development Association, sub-regional business organisations and local employers, resulting in responsive provision and a positive profile for HE in FE
- a student profile in which non-traditional participants make up a high proportion of the student body, and whose achievements match national benchmarks
- developing projects, innovative practice and the sharing of experience.

The focus on widening participation and encouraging student progression in a regional context has seen the consortium focus, firstly, on the development of foundation degrees and, secondly, on working towards standardising and integrating QA systems and processes. A successful consortium bid for funds to develop prototype foundation degrees resulted in extensive collaborative curriculum development work and the launch of two new programmes. Acknowledging the cost of this kind of development work, and that prototype funding will not be available in future, the consortium has set out guidelines for partner institutions' involvement in further foundation degree developments.

On the quality assurance front, the consortium accepted from the outset that it is 'collectively responsible for monitoring the quality and performance of the provision as a whole, since poor quality courses in any one or more institutions damages the reputation of the consortium as a whole and by implication all the partners individually'. Although much progress has been made in sharing good practice and in establishing standardisation and integrated systems, the fact that the consortium includes two HEIs, with different quality systems, has not made this an easy task. (It is the awarding university for a programme which must specify the regulations and procedures which it deems necessary to ensure that academic standards are met.)

Structure

Unlike some other partnerships, the consortium has a simple organisational structure. Each member institution is represented at a senior level on a management group which meets five or six times a year. The only other formally constituted body is a quality committee, reflecting the consortium's view of the importance of this area. With appropriate administrative support it will be able to fulfil a quality audit role for the consortium, monitoring performance indicators such as recruitment to targets, retention, achievement and progression. It also receives external moderator reports, recommends joint staff and curriculum development activities, undertakes student surveys across the consortium, and prepares an annual report on the performance of the consortium for governing bodies and other committees concerned with quality matters.

Despite this relatively simple structure the demands on the lead college are considerable. Activities include managing the consortium, preparing bids, liaison with HEFCE, data collection, consultation with members. The need for administrative support at an appropriate level has become increasingly apparent and accepted by members, even though there is an additional cost.

For the colleges, the benefits of consortium membership are seen primarily in the nature of the funding relationship which permits a degree of flexibility in planning and a greater sense of ownership of provision than might otherwise be the case. Other advantages include the growth of HE numbers, a widely shared quality assurance system, opening up a range of funding possibilities which would not necessarily be accessible to a single institution, and closer links with local universities and access to their expertise and facilities. Both universities have extensive networks of their own (some of which involve consortium institutions in a different capacity, as the regional picture of relationships is a complex one), but membership of the consortium emphasises their commitment to both the widening participation agenda and the regional cause.

Lessons from the Humber consortium

The prior existence of a partnership, as with the HETP consortium, was important in creating links between individuals and providing a base on which a new, more formally constituted partnership could be built. Concentration on developing foundation degrees and on quality assurance matters has given the consortium a sharp focus. Its simple organisational structure minimises the possibility of unwanted bureaucracy but, as the work of the consortium grows and becomes more complex, may be harder to sustain. The need for a more formal structure and a higher level of administrative support can be seen as a reflection of the consortium's success.

Contact

For further information about the work of the Humber FE/HE Consortium, visit www.lincoln.ac.uk/epd/humber.html.

3.4 Sheffield Hallam University Associate College Network

Key features:

- a non-funding partnership led by an HEI
- built on experience gained from earlier associate college arrangements

- strong administrative support
- a diversity of partners
- an effective system of sub-groups.

Background

The Sheffield Hallam Associate College Network (ACN) has its origins in the early 1990s when the university set up an ACN under a different agreement with a number of regional partners. As well as FECs, these partners included Rampton and Ashworth Special Hospitals, with which the then School of Health and Community Studies had strong curriculum links, including some validated provision. For the original FE providers the partnership was essentially a franchise relationship. During the mid-1990s, the university's franchise numbers topped 1,500, most of which were delivered by associate colleges.

The present, restructured ACN is a non-funding partnership, led by Sheffield Hallam University, with 10 FECs in membership and two health care trusts. It overlaps with a number of regional and sub-regional boundaries within which the respective institutions operate. The new network was formally established by an agreement signed by seven members in March 2001. Since then, a further five organisations have joined or rejoined the ACN, which now covers most of the FE providers in the sub-region of South Yorkshire, as well as a significant number of colleges in the immediate travel to study area of Sheffield.

Role of the network

The associate college agreement spells out the roles of the university and the colleges. For the university, the role is 'in higher education, with an emphasis on degree and postgraduate level work, underpinned by scholarship and research' and with a clear intention to disengage from FE level work. For the colleges the role is primarily in FE but with a recognition that there may also be a commitment to HE. Thus the primary objective of the ACN is 'to enhance educational opportunity by proactively developing educational provision which is articulated and enables progression', but it is recognised that when associate colleges have significant higher level HE provision themselves then the objective is 'to develop partnerships...for planning, delivery and assessment so as to maximise academic and professional exchange, enhance quality management and share learning materials and good practice'.

The associate college agreement is framed to permit a significant degree of flexibility in the kinds of collaboration that may be undertaken to achieve these objectives. This includes the possibility of setting up 'consortia and other formal legal arrangements' if there is clear value to initiatives which require this. However, in one important respect policy is unequivocal: 'The university will, wherever possible, adopt arrangements other than the franchising of courses in its relationship with associate colleges unless that prevents exploration of opportunities'.

This may not accord with HEFCE's stated preference for FECs to enter into indirect funding relationships, and the university does operate franchises where they continue to provide important widening participation benefits. However, on balance the university believes that there is more to be gained through operating equal partnerships with colleges, where the curriculum is jointly planned and collaboratively delivered, than in setting up new indirect funding relationships.

Structure and processes

The network is managed by an associate college steering group, made up of one representative from each partner institution, appointed by that institution's head. Representatives are of sufficient seniority to be able to make decisions on behalf of their institution in ACN matters. The chair and deputy chair are elected every two years by members of the steering group, which meets approximately three times a year.

The primary tasks of the steering group are:

- to prepare and agree annual and longer-term strategic plans for the network, and annual development plans for the network and individual colleges
- to review the strategic objectives and annual plans
- to oversee the effectiveness of collaborative programme planning across the network, the arrangements for quality and standards management and the enhancement of current collaborative programmes
- to monitor the fulfilment of the terms of associate college agreements and to monitor and evaluate the performance of the network against its targets and objectives
- to contribute to the annual review of the quality and academic standards of the programmes offered by the network which come within the scope of the university's associate college agreements
- to establish appropriate sub-groups and project groups to undertake work on behalf of the steering group.

The sub-groups and project groups are the means whereby networking between practitioners and the sharing of good practice takes place. Two formal sub-groups are active: one concerned with curriculum planning and development, and the other with quality and standards, management and enhancement.

The curriculum group has been considering how the work of a project to build pathways between FE and HE can become embedded within the mechanisms of the ACN. This work includes detailed articulation of a number of FEC-based HNC and HND programmes with degree provision at the university. The aim is to find ways not only to embed but also to enhance this work in other vocational areas, with the associated benefits of subject networking for HE staff, who are often isolated within particular subject areas in colleges. This work is being taken forward through the development (jointly by the ACN and the building pathways project team) of a detailed HE mapping database. This will inform guidance and marketing, as well as a proposed learning, teaching and assessment development programme (see below).

The quality and standards group provides a useful forum for disseminating feedback on the university's collaborative annual quality review process. It also provides a forum for consultation, discussion and dissemination in preparation for collaborative audit.

Practitioner forums have been set up in the areas of careers and educational guidance and learner support. Discussions are being held with member colleges about developing a programme of staff 'enrichment' activities – centred around learning, teaching and assessment – in which colleges may lead in particular areas, or be supported and enhanced by the university's learning and teaching institute in others. Models are also being considered for opening up access to the university's virtual learning environment (VLE).

These activities are co-ordinated and supported by a dedicated administrative function, which consists of a principal officer acting as a partnership co-ordinator, with an administrative assistant. This not only ensures professional support for the steering group in terms of papers and minutes for meetings, but also provides a focus for co-ordinating and accounting for the allocation and use of funds (where appropriate), data collection, audit information returns, and the collection of management information. The role is primarily developmental, and is concerned with initiating potential areas of collaborative working and bringing on board the relevant people in colleges and in the academic schools of the university. Since the ACN is seen to sit firmly within the university's widening participation strategy, the administrative function is currently funded from its widening participation premium.

Among the most important benefits of ACN membership for the colleges is access to the wider university community. Bilateral relationships between external partners and academic schools, while positive in terms of subject enhancement and curriculum development, can often mean isolation of the partner within that particular curriculum area. The ACN operates at an institutional level and provides an opportunity for colleges to influence university policy and strategy in areas pertinent to the FE/HE area. The opportunity to network with colleagues within the FE sector and across sub-regional boundaries, as well as within HE, is also one that does not always present itself in colleges, especially below the most senior levels.

For the university, the mechanisms of the network allow it to identify potential areas of curriculum collaboration in support of university-wide policy and strategy that go beyond its school boundaries. Through close collaboration with FECs, the university hopes to develop provision designed to support its widening participation strategy, enhance the learning experience for students making the transition from FE to HE, and improve recruitment (and retention) from within the local region. Enhancing collaboration on curriculum links, and working on more articulated routes from HE in FECs to the university will also help to ensure that its academic planning meets the needs and matches the skills of incoming students.

Lessons from the ACN

The previous network faltered largely because of changes in policy which provided an opportunity for colleges to bid directly for HE funding. That network's focus on a franchise relationship involved detailed development group meetings and allocation of numbers and targets by the university. As franchises began to reduce in number, coupled with changes of personnel at a senior level in the university, the network fell into decline.

The establishment of a dedicated co-ordinating post to take forward the aims and objectives of a new agreement was influential in bringing colleges back to the table. Issues of trust and financial matters concerning earlier franchise arrangements had to be worked through to reach a new level of understanding about the partnership approach being taken by the university. There is a great deal of positive and creative thinking about how the FECs might work with the university and, just as significantly, with each other, across a range of areas to enhance the skills and understanding of staff and to increase opportunities for students.

Contact

For further information of the work of the ACN contact Tracey Smith, Partnership Co-ordinator (tel 0114 225 3227, e-mail tracey.smith@shu.ac.uk).

3.5 Greater Manchester Consortium for HE in FE

Key features:

- a consortium in the early stages of development
- a partnership of FECs and sixth form colleges
- built on an existing network
- an emphasis on working groups to deliver small-scale projects and to disseminate the results.

Background

The Greater Manchester Consortium for HE in FE is still in its earliest stages. It was formally established on 7 March 2002 with a membership of 10 FECs offering higher education provision and two sixth form colleges (one with no HE as yet), working co-operatively with the six HEIs in Greater Manchester. When HEFCE proposed funding consortia in 1999, none of the local colleges was particularly interested. Most colleges which were directly funded by HEFCE also had some indirectly funded provision with a range of local HEI partners, and there was no sense either then or now that a consortium would create any immediate benefit.

In the autumn of 1999, City College Manchester and St Helen's College approached what was then the Further Education Development Agency (now the LSDA) to establish a regional forum for managers of HE in FE. The LSDA, HEFCE and the Association of Colleges launched the forum jointly with the support of the North-West Post-16 Network. The network agreed to facilitate and administer the forum and obtained funding from the Regional Development Agency to support its work. This practical co-ordinating support has been an important element in the forum's success.

Building on the experience of the forum in sharing good practice and discussing such matters as quality assurance, curriculum development bids, and development funding, six Manchester colleges decided to meet more locally to share plans for their HE curricula and consider joint bids for additional student numbers. The main impetus was to collaborate in such a way that any growth of HE provision in FE in Greater Manchester avoided duplication or increased competition. In the summer of 2001 the group decided that its discussions were important and useful and should be open to more colleges. Other colleges in Greater Manchester were invited to join the group.

Around the same time HEFCE held two national conferences for FECs. Some clear messages emerged about the drive towards collaboration and partnership, the part FE could play in widening participation, and the implications for quality of small pockets of HE provision. As a direct result of that conference, City College Manchester invited FECs with HE provision in Greater Manchester to discuss the possibility of setting up a consortium.

Role of the consortium

It was clear at the first meeting that colleges did not see the benefit of a funding consortium. Without a significant level of support the administration would be burdensome, and information gathering and reporting would be difficult. However, there was strong interest in a collaborative consortium which would work with HEIs on particular projects and share practice and experience of curriculum development, foundation degrees, marketing, progression

compacts, quality assurance and staff development. A number of colleges and HEIs were asked for their views. Even though they were not invited to join the consortium formally, the response from all six HEIs was extremely enthusiastic and each indicated areas of particular interest.

In developing the aims of the embryonic consortium it was recognised that the experiences of others would be valuable. Since it is led by a college (even though it is a funding consortium) the work of the established Humber FE/HE Consortium was especially relevant, and the advice from colleagues there was particularly helpful.

To formalise the consortium, FE colleges were invited to commit themselves to membership and allocate 2 per cent of their HEFCE allocation from the Development Fund for Learning and Teaching to support the consortium's activities. Twelve colleges became members, with a representative from each forming a steering group. One college with HE provision decided not to join.

At the first joint meeting, which included representatives of the six HEIs, the aims and objectives of the consortium were agreed as:

- to develop trust, co-operation and collaborative working between further education colleges in Greater Manchester in partnership with local higher education institutions through a Greater Manchester Collaborative Consortium for HE in FE
- to plan curriculum developments to meet local and regional needs to the mutual benefit of members and potential students
- to promote higher education in FE in Greater Manchester and widen participation from under-represented groups
- to share and disseminate good practice.

To achieve these aims the objectives of the consortium would be:

- to set up working groups to deliver specific small-scale projects to further the consortium's aims
- to establish active and productive partnerships with the six HEIs in Greater Manchester
- to promote and publicise HE provision in FE, to raise its profile in Greater Manchester in order to widen participation and increase progression
- to collaborate on curriculum development and work jointly on the production of bidding documents where appropriate
- to organise regional events to disseminate the outcomes of the projects
- to organise two staff development events per year open to all members.

Structure and processes

It was agreed from the start by all partners that this consortium would work by taking action rather than by talking. It was important for its steering group to agree a range of small-scale projects and to set a target of achieving outcomes and a dissemination event within 12 months. The projects, which are now in progress, are linked to the criteria for phase two of the Development Fund for Learning and Teaching, which has increased the funding available to directly funded colleges with more than 100 FTEs on HE courses. One benefit of the consortium is that it provides a way for colleges with fewer FTEs than this to submit a joint strategy and receive funding as part of the consortium.

The following groups have been established, each convened by a member of the steering group. At the time of writing 41 individuals have signed up to these projects from 14 institutions:

- progression compacts – research; establish common written agreement
- quality assurance – auditing and improving QA of HE in FECs by pairing staff from HEIs and FECs to review systems
- staff development – creating a register of staff in HEIs and FECs to give guest lectures, offer work shadowing, peer review of teaching, mentoring
- widening participation and marketing – promote HE in FE in Greater Manchester by publishing a list of HE courses available in colleges.

It is too soon to know how this approach will work. However, there is a degree of openness, trust and enthusiasm that suggests that all participants will gain something during the life of the projects, and it is hoped that more developed thinking will follow from these first initiatives.

Challenges

Because these are such early days for the consortium it is premature to try to identify lessons from its experiences. However, some of the challenges it faces are becoming apparent, including:

- maintaining good communications and commitment
- working co-operatively, building on trust and openness
- finding time to achieve all goals
- ensuring that competition does not impede progress
- establishing a common purpose, supported by senior and operational levels of the organisations
- maintaining the commitment of partners and HEIs
- avoiding competition and curriculum duplication.

3.6 Suffolk College and University of East Anglia Partnership

Key features:

- collaboration between a large 'mixed economy group' college and a university
- an associate college relationship involving substantial delegation of authority
- provision of higher education in a county with no HEI
- planning to avoid local competition.

Background

Suffolk College is close to Ipswich town centre and serves not only the town but also a large rural area. There is no university in Suffolk and the college is the largest provider of higher education in the county. It has some 5,000 higher education students studying a range of undergraduate, postgraduate and professional courses.

Suffolk College is an accredited college of the University of East Anglia (UEA). In the late 1980s and early 1990s the college began to expand its higher education provision, working with a number of validating bodies. In 1992, the college decided to look for a local validating partner which could provide a robust relationship in which it would be relatively easy for key players to meet regularly, and which would not be in direct competition. Several 'local' universities were considered and various exploratory approaches were made. UEA, through

its senior management, expressed a positive interest in developing a relationship. The university's academic registrar, together with the then vice-principal at Suffolk College, steered the embryonic relationship through the formal channels at the university and the college, and worked to bring members of staff at both institutions on board.

The college's academic board supported an institutional agreement between Suffolk College and UEA, the university effectively taking over validating body responsibility for courses previously validated by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). The college was accorded the status of associate college of UEA, and it was agreed that the two institutions would work in partnership to develop a strategy to increase access to higher education across the region.

As the partnership developed and matured, further devolution of responsibilities to the college was agreed, and in 1996 it was given institutional accreditation for the validation and quality assurance of undergraduate awards. The accreditation agreement also stipulated that the college should terminate any remaining relationships with other validating partners.

The two institutions have continued to work in partnership, with UEA acting as sole validating partner for all undergraduate and postgraduate provision at the college. In 2001 UEA re-accredited the college for a further five years following a formal review process in which it was found that the college had 'embedded and robust' quality assurance systems and procedures.

Role of the partnership

The aims of the partnership as outlined in the institutional agreement are:

- to work in partnership to increase the opportunities available for higher education study in the region
- to widen access to higher education and progression from further education and the schools system in the region
- to facilitate staff development and collaborative opportunities for staff at both institutions.

The partnership provides opportunities for joint staff development activities, with staff from both institutions being invited to attend a range of formal events. However, it is at more 'local' levels, where good relationships have developed between practitioners, that the most fruitful exchanges of good practice and development take place.

For the university the partnership plays a key role in its widening participation activities, providing HE for students who could not travel to UEA and offering them a wider range of broader, modular courses. From the college's perspective there is the attraction for students of achieving a UEA award, which is seen to be of high status. The geography of the partnership is such that the two institutions are near enough to sustain the relationship but not close enough for competition to be an issue.

In any case, both parties recognise that they have different missions: UEA has a strong research profile and attracts students from a wide national and international market, while the college attracts a predominantly local and regional market and prides itself on providing opportunities to those who traditionally have not been able to access HE. This divergence of missions might be seen as a problem for the future of the partnership, but for the most part

the two institutions view their work as complementary, with their collaboration underpinning the widening participation agenda that is common to both.

Structure and processes

The institutional agreement is subject to five-yearly review, and the academic registrars of both institutions are responsible for monitoring compliance and for oversight of the financial arrangements. The recent re-accreditation process was undertaken in line with the QAA code of practice on collaborative provision, and involved an external panel member, meetings with staff and students, and consideration of student work. This process reinforced the confidence which UEA has in the college's quality assurance processes and procedures.

There are two formal joint committees:

- the joint academic planning forum, which identifies areas of potential collaboration and competition between UEA and Suffolk College. This is jointly chaired by the pro vice-chancellor responsible for external affairs at UEA and the assistant principal (HE) at Suffolk College. All proposals for new, amended or withdrawn UEA awards offered at the college are submitted to this committee following approval by the college's HE approvals committee
- the joint academic committee, which has formal responsibility for the validation of postgraduate courses delivered at the college. It also monitors issues arising from accreditation and contributes to the development of the annual accreditation report, which is submitted to the senate of UEA and the academic board of Suffolk College. This committee is chaired by the director of off-campus and collaborative provision at UEA and the vice-chair is the dean of quality enhancement for HE at the college.

In addition to the joint committee structure there are both formal and informal links which reinforce the partnership. In particular, UEA representatives are members of Suffolk College's committees for quality management and enhancement, and research. Similarly, college staff are members of UEA's senate, the learning, teaching and quality committee, and the validation forum.

At the practitioner level there are formal links enshrined in the institutional agreement in the form of UEA advisers. There are ten advisers from departments at the university who are linked to broadly cognate areas of the college. As UEA and the college offer different curricula, the advisers cannot all offer subject expertise. Their role is seen primarily as that of 'critical friend', and works most successfully when both parties recognise the importance of reciprocity of experience.

Lessons from the partnership

Both institutions believe the partnership has been successful in meeting its aims and that it has worked because the two partners, despite their different roles, enjoy equal status. The partnership has enabled both institutions to fulfil aspects of their missions; gives students access to HE in a county which does not have an HEI; provides a good example of regional partnership and regional strategy; and offers a means to avoid local competition for students, or if necessary to address it constructively. The partnership has allowed the college to achieve a substantial level of autonomy and ownership of programmes of study, particularly undergraduate awards, while the accreditation process itself has further enhanced trust between the parties.

3.7 Discussion

There are no 'recipes for success' when it comes to forming and maintaining effective partnerships, nor a preferred model for the structure of any collaborative arrangements. Nonetheless, there are some common features of successful partnerships, and some lessons to be drawn from the experiences of those who have been involved in collaborative work.

Pre-requisites of successful partnerships

Perhaps the most important requirement is clarity of purpose: without a clear and shared understanding of why the partnership should exist and what it seeks to achieve it is unlikely to be successful.

This has to be underpinned by a genuine willingness to be involved and a corresponding commitment to collaborative working in the belief that there are real benefits for all partners. Enforced or artificial collaboration, sometimes undertaken for short-term political reasons or in the belief that this kind of activity is expected at a local or sub-regional level, is unlikely to be sustainable or to produce real benefits.

Commitment of the partners must reflect an informed awareness of the costs of working in partnership – especially in terms of time. For an institution involved in multiple partnerships these costs may be so high that there is a case for rationalising its collaborative links.

Ethos

In the words of one FE/HE partnership, collaborative arrangements should be characterised by 'equality and reciprocity, openness and transparency, shared resources and responsibilities'. The importance of recognising the equality of all partners is vital: the 'industrial-strength condescension' which one FE colleague detected emanating from a partner HEI did not provide the basis for a productive relationship.

There has to be a willingness to compromise on the part of all partners, and an acknowledgement that less than ideal solutions for individual partners may be the best outcome collectively.

Structure

The key factor must be fitness for purpose. Agreement about objectives should determine what kind of partnership is required: a consortium of FECs alone, or of colleges and one or more HEIs; a funding or a non-funding consortium; formally constituted or more loosely linked. The degree of formality will of course be greater in, for example, a consortium that is recognised by HEFCE for funding purposes. But in other arrangements too there is evidence that a concise and collectively agreed memorandum of agreement (or whatever the arrangement is called) is important – not least as a way of recognising those features referred to above which characterise best collaborative practice.

The advantages of exploiting existing or prior networks in building a partnership could be seen in several of the case studies and other collaborative arrangements studied. These networks may have had no direct relevance to the focus of the new partnerships, but the

benefits of working with those whom 'you know you can do business with', as one respondent put it, were frequently pointed out.

Even more often, the importance of proper administrative support was stressed. Partnerships account for a great deal of people's time, so a professional approach to administration is essential. While there is a cost to this (and the arrangements for meeting that cost must be transparent and agreed), there are potentially greater costs in not having someone in this role.

The most effective partnerships involve, in some capacity, all categories of staff. Senior management involvement is important in sending out a message of institutional support and in emphasising that collaborative activities are valued. In many FE/HE partnerships a management group or executive serves this function and, in some cases, plays a much more active and hands-on role than a purely symbolic one (important though that can be).

Involving staff who are at the sharp end of delivery in collaborative activities can be more difficult. The constraints imposed on FE staff by their terms and conditions of employment are well known; for their counterparts in HE there are issues of priorities and incentives to become involved in partnership working. Structures can provide only a partial solution to these problems, but there is evidence that appropriate sub-groups, working parties and such like, which bring together FE and HE staff around topics of mutual interest and concern, can be effective in starting a dialogue.

Process

It can be helpful initially for partnerships to focus on a relatively limited number of key issues (such as developing foundation degrees or creating a consistent HE QA system across the partnership), in order to achieve early successes and establish a collaborative approach. However, care must be taken to ensure that concentrating on practical issues does not result in the loss of a more strategic perspective. Flexibility to respond creatively to changing external circumstances is an important characteristic of successful partnerships.

Finally, all partnerships, and all those thinking of collaborative arrangements, should familiarise themselves with HEFCE's examples of good practice in consortia agreements (on the web at www.hefce.ac.uk under Good practice), and codes of practice for franchise and consortia arrangements (HEFCE 00/54), and the QAA's code of practice for collaborative provision (www.qaa.ac.uk).

4 Strategic planning and management

4.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a framework to support the management of HE in FE. It builds on the experience of colleges in the development and management of higher education and offers practical advice on effective approaches. It seeks to translate the broader contextual vision into specific questions for institutions engaged in this work, and explores the need for the FE sector to formulate views, a voice, and ways of influencing the sectoral policy and strategy which steers such provision.

Two of the dominant themes in HE policy development are the drive to assure quality and standards wherever HE is delivered, and the drive to widen the participation of those social groups still under-represented in HE. These two themes underpin many of the approaches discussed in this chapter.

4.2 National policy drivers

The Government has set a target that, by the year 2010, 50 per cent of young people aged 18-30 should have studied a course of higher education. The work undertaken by FECs in delivering programmes of higher education is critical to the achievement of this target (see Chapter 1). This policy objective clearly complements the widening participation work which is already at the heart of further education.

A second major driver has been the quality agenda. The need to establish clear standards and quality in higher education has focused attention on both the strengths and weaknesses of HE provision in FECs (see Chapter 2), although national publicity has not always been even-handed. It is in the interests of FECs delivering HE that the provision is demonstrably fit for purpose, and of a standard comparable to that in other parts of the HE sector.

The introduction of foundation degrees, and the establishment of Sector Skills Councils, have provided new opportunities for FECs to demonstrate the strength of their links with employers, and the potential for innovative vocationally-focused curriculum development.

In addition to policy developments focused on higher education, managers of HE in FECs also need to be aware of the implications of wider legislative developments, particularly those relating to disability and race. For further information, see Annex B.

4.3 The regional context

The growth of regional structures and regionally-focused policy initiatives increasingly informs developments in higher and further education. Examples include:

- Learning Partnerships
- Learning and Skills Councils
- Regional Development Agencies
- foundation degrees
- HE regional consortia
- HE/FE funding consortia

- Excellence Challenge
- joint HEFCE/LSC Partnerships for Progression initiative, aimed at raising aspirations and widening participation in HE.

In reviewing and planning HE provision, colleges should take account of regional developments which may inform future recruitment, curriculum development and opportunities for collaboration.

Some examples of responses to regional developments include:

- increase in data collection to monitor student profile at HE level in comparison to regional profile
- , strengthened links with local employers
- design and delivery of foundation degrees
- development/enhancement of progression arrangements
- participation in HE/FE networks
- plans for Partnerships for Progression
- FE/HE mergers
- New Technology Institutes.

The regional context: questions for discussion

- Has the college recently reviewed its HE provision in the light of these developments?
- How might the regional context influence planning in the future?

4.4 Strategy and purpose

Given the pressures and expectations placed on the delivery of higher education in FE, colleges must develop a strategy for HE based on an agreed understanding of the purposes and aims of this provision, and the role of HE within the college as a whole.

The development of HE provision in colleges has been driven by many factors. Historically, it may have emerged as an explicit strategy to develop HE provision, or it may have developed on a more ad hoc basis, as a response to different circumstances over time. In some cases, its growth may have been dependent on the initiative and enthusiasm of one or two members of staff. Much vocational provision originally developed independently of higher education and, although the level of the work is clearly HE and now funded by HEFCE, staff and students may not consciously identify with broader HE sectoral issues.

Even where provision is long-standing, it should form part of an explicit strategy which meets the needs of an identifiable market, and which has been widely discussed with staff involved in the planning and delivery of HE in the college.

HE provision should be incorporated within the overall college strategic and operational plans, which should reflect intentions and resources available for sustaining, developing and enhancing this area of work. Where development is aimed at widening participation to HE, the provision should clearly relate to both college and regional widening participation priorities. The relationship between HE provision and other aspects of college provision, such as student support services, should be clearly worked out.

HE provision should be included in the annual cycle of planning and review by the academic board. It may also usefully be included in the college self-assessment report, drawing attention to progression opportunities and the coherence of strategy across FE and HE provision.

Strategy and purpose: questions for discussion

- Why is HE offered in the college?
- What relationship does HE provision have with wider regional and/or national priorities?
- How is HE incorporated within the overall planning and review processes?
- Does HE provision connect across all levels and sections of the college work?

4.5 Key elements of an HE strategy

The following seven sections build on information provided by colleges during the research undertaken by the University of Warwick, and provide an overview of key themes to be considered in the planning process:

- an HE environment
- collaboration
- staffing
- human resources
- scholarly activity
- academic quality and standards
- the student experience.

A fuller presentation of good practice aimed at practitioners is available in the sister document, 'Supporting higher education in further education colleges: a guide for tutors and lecturers' (HEFCE 2003/15).

4.6 An HE environment

FECs need to be able to demonstrate to their students, to HEFCE, and to the QAA, that they can offer a study environment and work environment appropriate to support the learning goals of HE students. Given the diversity of circumstances in which colleges offer higher education, and indeed the diversity of the HE sector, there can be no standard model. However, FECs might like to consider the variety of ways through which an HE environment can be developed in their institution.

The HE environment should reflect what is appropriate in the context of the college's mission for HE. Bearing in mind the diversity and non-traditional characteristics of many students following HE courses in FE, it will demonstrate a range of responses to the academic and support needs of target students.

A number of colleges with substantial HE provision have chosen to designate a specific area of the college as a higher education centre. This may include a designated administrative office. These innovations usually prove popular with HE students, but the impact on the rest

of the college will need to be discussed carefully. For example, the most favourable conditions under which to encourage internal progression into HE may be an important factor to consider.

A key feature of the HE environment is the external links which nurture and enhance the provision offered. This is true whatever the size of the college's provision. Examples of activities generated by such links include collaborative strategic developments, staff and student visits to HEIs, web links, development of progression routes, and joint teaching. Chapter 3 discusses some possible relationships between FECs and HEIs.

Industrial and professional links are equally important for vocational provision, and are invaluable in sustaining an up-to-date knowledge base and curriculum. These could include visiting lecturers, student placements, visits, and joint course design. Many such links have informed the development of foundation degrees.

Links across the college between staff engaged in the development and delivery of HE programmes are particularly valuable, and in a number of colleges have led to the establishment of an HE forum. Useful relationships may also be built with other FECs offering HE provision, based on proximity or subject area, or, for colleges with larger programmes, developed through organisations such as the Mixed Economy Group.

A key feature of an HE environment is the extent to which staff are encouraged to take part in activities aimed at informing and enriching their subject knowledge. FECs should consider ways to develop staff by creating opportunities to engage in scholarship and research linked to HE or to industry. See Chapter 2, and HEFCE 2003/15).

Symbolic gestures to reinforce the 'image' of FECs as providers of higher education include the use of HEI logos on promotional materials, and the staging of college-focused graduation ceremonies.

An HE environment: questions for discussion

- Are the accommodation and facilities available to HE students in the college appropriate to their needs?
- How does the staffing structure reflect the purposes of the college in delivering HE?
- Have effective links been developed with local HEIs and industry/professional organisations?
- Have the roles of partners in the development of collaborative relationships been clearly defined?
- What mechanisms exist for developing and sustaining internal links between all staff involved in the planning and delivery of HE?

4.7 Collaboration

Colleges offering higher education may wish to develop collaborative relationships to support and enhance their HE provision. Such arrangements may be expressly to support HE in FE

provision, or may have a wider strategic purpose in relation to widening participation (see Chapter 3).

Building productive and useful partnerships is inevitably time-intensive, but the benefits are substantial in terms of strategy, student recruitment, retention and progression, access to resources, and staff development. HE/FE partnerships are a two-way street and much mutual benefit can derive when the relationship is one of mutual respect, has clear shared purposes, and is effectively and efficiently managed on both sides.

Collaboration is a warm word, but, as many institutions can attest, the reality can be frustrating and problematic, unless there are effective processes to enable shared commitments to be met. Clear and explicit lines of management and communication both internally and externally are key to this, and should be evident in both HE and FE institutions which are seeking to collaborate.

Many colleges have found it useful to designate responsibility for collaborative work with HE to a senior member of staff. In addition to responsibility for external links, this role involves linking staff who deliver HE in the college and those responsible for planning. New initiatives are likely to be most effective if they have been negotiated with teaching staff and support staff at an early stage.

Personal links between senior managers in participating institutions are important to 'oil the wheels', and to discuss and align strategic objectives. However, it is not helpful to make decisions which cut across existing activity being undertaken by the designated HE manager.

HEFCE regional consultants can offer an informed overview of regional and national developments in HE and are a valuable source of advice and expertise. The college may find it useful to make contact with their consultant to discuss college provision in the context of broader collaborative arrangements and future plans, in particular Partnerships for Progression.

Collaboration: questions for discussion

- Do HE in FE collaborative activities link clearly with the college strategic plan?
- Have sufficient staff resources been identified to support this work at every level?
- Are internal channels of communication in place to inform policy development and support implementation of strategy?
- How does the college keep up-to-date with the wider regional and national picture in relation to collaborative HE/FE provision?

4.8 Staffing

Approaches to staff deployment vary across colleges and relate closely to the nature of the HE environment which the college seeks to develop. A number of colleges with high levels of provision employ designated HE staff. This may make it easier for staff to work together in creating a distinct HE environment and developing associated scholarly activity.

However, other colleges view teaching on HE courses as an opportunity they wish to make available for all staff. Many colleges consider it a positive advantage for staff to teach at different levels. In colleges with few HE students, it may not be feasible for staff to be timetabled solely in delivering HE. In these cases, other arrangements are needed to support staff in understanding the requirements of HE and developing an appropriate environment for HE students and staff.

The use of part-time staff can be particularly beneficial where they bring with them current industrial and/or professional expertise. Their induction and support as part of the HE team is particularly important.

Colleges should, where possible, specify the qualifications required of staff teaching on HE courses. This will be necessary for any validation or re-validation processes, and should inform staff development planning. As a rule of thumb, staff are expected to be qualified at least one level higher than the level they are teaching, or to demonstrate considerable professional or industrial experience.

Staffing: questions for discussion

- In the context of the possibilities and constraints of the college, what approach to staffing HE provision is likely to offer the best experience to students?
- What policies has the college developed to define appropriate staff qualifications, and opportunities for staff to gain these qualifications?

4.9 Human resources

Institutions should review their human resource strategy in the light of a strengthened strategic focus on higher education. Practical examples of good practice in staff development are incorporated in HEFCE 2003/15.

FECs should recognise the staff development needs of the range of staff engaged in HE provision. This will include both full-time and part-time lecturing staff; staff providing student support (guidance, careers, libraries, ICT, and study skills support); and staff engaged in the administration of HE programmes.

A comprehensive range of activities will include:

- staff review and appraisal systems
- incentives, including remission of teaching
- peer support mechanisms
- support and training around assessment, such as joint marking, or internal verification processes
- engagement in scholarly activity
- involvement in external processes such as QAA review
- engagement in national HE initiatives, for example through LTSN subject networks.

Ways can be found to enable staff to participate in such activities. For example, release and cover arrangements will need to be in place at the beginning of the academic year to ensure that designated staff can take advantage of these opportunities.

Peer support for staff teaching HE in FE has proved particularly effective. A college-wide forum of staff provides a good focus for staff development in relation to topics such as quality, assessment, and curriculum.

Colleges have found it valuable to include in these activities their admissions staff, student support and learning centre staff who have key roles in advising and supporting HE students and in developing academic and vocational progression routes.

Human resources: questions for discussion

- Does the college have a comprehensive list of staff engaged in providing HE courses in order to assist effective planning and support?
- Are staff development opportunities – focused on subject knowledge, teaching and learning, support and progression – available for all grades of staff involved in the delivery of HE provision?
- What mechanisms enable staff to take advantage of these opportunities? How are the outcomes evaluated?
- How are these processes embedded in order to contribute to a sound basis for development and quality enhancement?

4.10 Scholarly activity

Evidence suggests that there are two broad approaches to scholarly activity undertaken in FECs: one focuses on the development of provision, and the other is subject-based.

Activities related to the development of provision include:

- informing curriculum development, such as foundation degrees
- building more effective transition between levels of study
- exploring student expectations
- identifying gaps in provision.

A subject-based approach aims to enhance teaching by enabling staff to develop and update their subject knowledge and/or professional practice through, for example:

- staff enrolling on higher degrees
- secondments to HE
- facilitating opportunities for updating professional expertise
- conferences
- subject-based research
- consultancy
- writing and presentation of papers.

Scholarly activity: questions for discussion

- How is the development of HE provision informed by systematic enquiry, evidence collection and awareness of good practice?
- How is HE teaching in the college informed by up-to-date academic and professional subject knowledge?
- What is the time-scale for development? Does the college have a long-term view which permits planning of resources and progressive staff development?
- What is the contribution of local HEIs? Is the college taking full advantage of the opportunities available? How is it linking in with HE expertise and facilities at local and national level?

4.11 Academic quality and standards

FECs are subject to the differing quality regimes of OFSTED, ALI and the QAA. A key feature of QAA scrutiny is that it is a peer review process, not an inspection. Another distinctive element is that colleges are reviewed by subject, not programme area, although on occasion two subjects can be combined in one review.

The process of academic review requires that institutions address questions of standards through a number of external reference points. The development of these must be a priority for all FECs with HE provision. (For more detail, see HEFCE 2003/15.) Staff responsible for HE must be trained to address these points and the other elements of academic review. Releasing subject specialists to train as reviewers is an excellent way of ensuring the dissemination of information within the institution.

Preparing for a QAA subject review is an intensive and time-consuming process and requires practical support and encouragement from the management. Course teams need administrative support and time to reflect on their provision and prepare evidence for the review. Teams that do not have this support may not have a successful review. Course teams usually acknowledge the value of a review in terms of staff development activity and even as a free consultancy.

Many FECs with some experience of QAA subject review are making changes and improvements to their quality systems to embed the rigour and procedures necessary for a successful review. In time, these adapted quality systems will provide a sustainable base from which to conduct a 'lighter touch' review.

Academic standards and quality: questions for discussion

- Do key HE staff have a good grasp of the requirements of academic review?
- How does the college support staff preparing for subject review in terms of planning and staff development?
- Has a local or linked HEI offered support or advice about QAA subject review? If not, should they be contacted?

- Has the college reviewed its quality systems to ensure that it can demonstrate the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards?
- Has the college introduced peer review of teaching (in addition to its other systems of teaching and learning observation)?

4.12 The student experience

Good practice guidance in widening participation is increasingly based on a 'student life-cycle' approach (see HEFCE 01/36). Planning focuses on the development of a set of connecting processes which support the student from pre-entry to exit, in ways that are informed by consistent monitoring of the student experience at key stages.

Colleges must be able to identify the features of the distinct experience offered to students. For promotional purposes, it is obviously important to identify activities which are directly experienced by students. For retention and for quality purposes, there should be a coherent set of processes designed to enhance the learner experience and feed back into development.

Not all HE students, particularly in colleges with limited provision, will have a well-developed sense of how an HE experience should 'feel'. Some, particularly those on vocational courses, may not be aware that they are studying at HE level. It is important that all students are encouraged to feel part of an HE environment, and to recognise the opportunities it offers and their responsibilities within it.

There are a number of key events and processes which are arguably common to the experience of all HE students and which must be managed as part of HE provision. FECs might find it useful to put in place a range of feedback loops to assist monitoring and evaluation at these key points. They include:

- information, advice and guidance on HE opportunities, studying at HE level, HE progression routes, and employment opportunities
- a fair and transparent admissions process
- academic support in reaching the required academic standards and the skills necessary to achieve these
- ICT facilities comparable to those available in industry and HEIs
- study facilities appropriate to the purpose
- strong links with industrial, professional or academic worlds beyond the college, whether in the workplace or the HEI.

The student experience: questions for discussion

- How does an understanding of the student life-cycle inform planning?
- What tracking processes has the college developed to enable this knowledge to be embedded in the development of provision?
- What steps has the college taken to build a comprehensive and inter-connecting approach to supporting HE students through from pre-entry to exit?

4.13 Monitoring and evaluation

In line with institutions in the HE sector, FECs are increasingly being required to analyse and demonstrate the effectiveness of their HE provision. The mechanisms to undertake this will reflect the structure of HE provision in the college.

A clear strategy with specific and measurable objectives is necessary as a basis for monitoring progress. Milestones should be identified against which progress can be measured, and the provision should be reviewed as part of the annual review and planning cycle. For colleges with substantial provision, these processes should underpin the ways in which the HEFCE Development Fund is used to enhance provision.

Responsibility for the supervision of monitoring and evaluation processes should be clearly identified.

The college should consider how provision will be judged to be effective and what performance indicators will be most appropriate for this purpose.

All colleges should have processes to generate information, on the basis of which evaluative judgements may be made about the college's HE provision (see HEFCE 2003/15). This should include gathering key statistical information on:

- student profile
- inputs
- outcomes
- external examiners'/verifiers' reports
- QAA review reports
- feedback from students.

Monitoring and evaluation: questions for discussion

- What progress has been made towards developing and achieving targets for HE in the college in relation to recruitment, retention, achievement and staff research?
- How effective are the mechanisms for monitoring HE provision, and who holds responsibility for this process?
- If the college is seeking to put in place a long-term plan for its HE provision, what milestones have been identified?
- On what basis will provision be judged to be effective?
- Do the management information systems underpin this quality process?

4.14 Representation

Developing a voice

The process of developing a distinctive voice for HE in FE starts within the college in relation to its mission, its student body and its staff. Colleges that have developed forums to stimulate cross-institution communication and debate testify to the importance of developing a collective voice. The benefits include:

- giving staff the opportunity to develop an understanding of the wider context of their work

- providing a focus for developing arguments with which to engage in regional debates on HE
- encouraging staff to be self-critical, more confident and developmental in their thinking when presenting and reflecting upon their experience in teaching HE in FE.

Colleges can participate in debates on the development of higher education, responding to consultation papers from HEFCE and the QAA, accessible on their respective web-sites, www.hefce.ac.uk and www.qaa.ac.uk.

A national voice

If HE in FE is to continue to rise to the challenge offered by government policy on widening participation, the contribution of both managers and practitioners in FE to the development of policy is increasingly important. This can be developed through participating in some of the many nationwide organisations and networks. Some of these, along with contact details, are listed in Annex C.

Representation: questions for discussion

- How does the college build and promote its views on the development of HE in FE? How are staff at all levels included in this process?
- What is the system for distributing, discussing and responding to HEFCE and other key consultation papers relating to HE in FE?
- How actively does the college relate to national agencies promoting the voice of FE in the development of HE?

Annex A

Membership of project team, advisory group and working group

Project team

Jane Thompson (Project Director), NIACE
Penny Blackie, City College Manchester
Professor John Field, University of Sterling
Dr Barbara Merrill, University of Warwick
Dr Russell Moseley, University of Warwick
Cal Weatherald, Sheffield Hallam University

Project evaluator
Professor Gareth Parry, University of Sheffield

Project advisory group
Sue Crowley, Learning & Skills Development Agency
Susan Hayday, Association of Colleges
Margaret Lawson, Association of Colleges
Roger Lewis, Higher Education Funding Council for England
Penny McCracken, Quality Assurance Agency
Julia Moss, Higher Education Funding Council for England
Caroline Neville, Norwich City College
Professor Leni Oglesby, Manchester Metropolitan University
Lynn Parker, Hull College
Dr Michael Thrower, Northbrook College, Sussex
Keith Webb, University of Huddersfield

Good practice guidance working group
Alexa Christou, Sheffield Hallam University/Quality Assurance Agency
Arthur Knevett, Grimsby College
Jackie Powell, Chesterfield College
Anne Thompson, Waltham Forest College

Annex B

Recent legislation on disability and race relations

Disability

Under the terms of the new Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, which extends the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act to higher education, providers of HE will be required to demonstrate what action is being taken to provide an inclusive learning environment for disabled students. It is likely that colleges will already have developed strategies in this area. However, they should ensure that, where provision is franchised from an HEI, or where students are progressing through to higher level study in an HEI, arrangements and processes in both institutions are clearly understood by staff and students. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that admissions arrangements are equitable. See also the QAA code of practice on disability.

Under the terms of the 2001 Act, institutions will be deemed to know about a student's disability as soon as the disability has been disclosed to an individual member of staff. Colleges will need to develop guidelines to advise their staff on how to respond when HE students disclose a disability. In the case of franchised provision, it should also be made clear whether information needs to be passed on to the HEI which has validated the provision. Further guidance will be forthcoming on this issue.

The college will be expected to make 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate the needs of disabled students. This is defined in the Disability Rights Commission Post-16 Code of Practice (paragraph 5.5) as 'an anticipatory duty owed to disabled people and students at large' (see the commission's web-site, www.drc-gb.org). This relates not only to facilities and support, but should include consideration of the implications for formal assessment procedures. Where provision is franchised, a college and any franchising HEI should liaise at an early stage to ensure compliance with the Act.

Race relations

The Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 came into force on 3 December 2001. The new duties require public bodies to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good race relations between people of different racial groups.

While it is likely that FECs will be applying to HE provision the same level of scrutiny as that applied to FE provision, again it is important that the processes characteristic of HE are scrutinised, in particular admissions and assessment.

Under the new legislation, the governing body of an institution is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act. Managers should be clear where responsibility lies for their HE provision, and recognise accountability for the duties set out in the legislation.

It is important to note that the Act also covers international students.

Annex C

Addresses and web-sites

Higher education sector

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Northavon House Coldharbour Lane BRISTOL BS16 1QD	tel: 0117 931 7317 fax: 0117 931 7203 e-mail: hefce@hefce.ac.uk www.hefce.ac.uk
Higher Education Staff Development Association (HESDA) Ingram House, 65 Wilkinson Street University of Sheffield SHEFFIELD S10 2GJ	tel: 0114 222 1335 fax: 0114 222 1333 www.hesda.org.uk
Learning & Teaching Support Network (LTSN) The Network Centre Innovation Close, York Science Park Heslington YORK YO10 5ZF	tel: 01904 754500 fax: 01904 754599 e-mail: enquiries@ltsn.ac.uk www.ltsn.ac.uk
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Southgate House Southgate Street GLOUCESTER GL1 1UB	tel: 01452 557000 fax: 01452 557070 e-mail: comms@qaa.ac.uk www.qaa.ac.uk
Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) 76 Portland Place LONDON W1B 1NT	tel: 020 7637 2766 fax: 020 7637 2781 e-mail srheoffice@srhe.ac.uk www.srhe.ac.uk
Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) Selly Wick House, 59-61 Selly Wick Road Selly Park BIRMINGHAM B29 7JE	tel: 0121 415 6801 fax: 0121 415 6802 e-mail: office@seda.ac.uk www.seda.ac.uk
Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) Woburn House 20 Tavistock Square LONDON WC1H 9HB	tel: 020 7387 7711 fax: 020 7387 7712 e-mail: info@scop.ac.uk www.scop.ac.uk
Universities UK 20 Tavistock Square	tel: 020 7419 4111 fax: 020 7388 8649

LONDON WC1H 9HB	e-mail: info@universitiesuk.ac.uk www.universitiesuk.ac.uk

Further education sector

Association of Colleges (AoC) 5th Floor, Centre Point 103 New Oxford Street LONDON WC1A 1RG	tel: 020 7827 4600 fax: 020 7827 4650 www.aoc.co.uk
Edexcel Stewart House 32 Russell Square LONDON WC1B 5DN	tel: 0870 240 9800 fax: 020 7758 6960 e-mail: enquiries@edexcel.org.uk www.edexcel.org.uk
Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Cheylesmore House Quinton Road COVENTRY CV1 2WT	tel: 0845 019 4170 fax: 024 7649 3600 e-mail: info@lsc.gov.uk www.lsc.gov.uk
Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) Regent Arcade House, 19-25 Argyll Street LONDON W1F 7LS	tel: 020 7297 9000 fax: 020 7297 9001 e-mail: enquiries@lsda.org.uk www.lsda.org.uk
Learning and Skills Research Network Contact: Pam Rivers	tel: 020 7840 5321 fax: 020 7840 5401 e-mail: PRivers@lsda.org.uk
Mixed Economy Group of Colleges (MEG) c/o NISS Queen Anne House 11 Charlotte Street BATH BA1 2NE	e-mail niss@niss.ac.uk
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) 83 Piccadilly LONDON W1J 8QA	tel: 020 7509 5555 fax: 020 7509 6666 e-mail: info@qca.org.uk www.qca.org.uk

Professional/independent organisations

Forum of Adult and Continuing Education (FACE) Widening Participation Unit University of East London Romford Road LONDON E15 4LZ	tel: 020 8223 4936 www.f-a-c-e.org.uk
National Association for Business Studies Education (NABSE) c/o Complete Support Group Ltd 27 Chester Road Castle Bromwich BIRMINGHAM B36 9DA	tel: 0121 776 7766 fax: 0121 778 7766 e-mail: nabse@completesupport.co.uk www.nabse.ac.uk
University Association for Continuing Education (UACE) Centre for Lifelong Learning King George VI Building University of Newcastle upon Tyne NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE NE1 7RU	tel: 0191 222 6546 fax: 0191 222 7091 www.uace.org.uk
National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) 27 Britannia Street LONDON WC1X 9JP	tel: 020 7837 3636 fax: 020 7837 4403 minicom: 020 7278 0470 e-mail: hq@natfhe.org.uk www.natfhe.org.uk
National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (SKILL) Chapter House 18-20 Crucifix Lane LONDON SE1 3JW	tel: 020 7450 0620 fax: 020 7450 0650 e-mail: info@skill.org.uk www.skill.org.uk
National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) 21 De Montfort Street LEICESTER LE1 7GE	tel: 0116 204 4200 fax: 0116 285 4514 e-mail: enquiries@niace.org.uk www.niace.org.uk

List of abbreviations

ACN	Associate College Network
ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
FE	Further education
FEC	Further education college
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FTE	Full-time equivalent
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HETP	Higher Education & Training Partnership
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (in Scotland)
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
ICT	Information and communications technology
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
LTSN	Learning and Teaching Support Network
NIACE	National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
QA	Quality assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
UEA	University of East Anglia
VLE	Virtual learning environment

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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